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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 000593

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA, NEA/ARP, NEA/EX, S/CT, CA, DS/DSS,  
DS/IP/NEA, NEA/PPD, DS/DSS/ITA, DS/ICI/PII, CENTCOM FOR  
POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/23/2013  
TAGS: ASEC AMGT PREL PTER CASC YM DOMESTIC POLITICS  
SUBJECT: TF1Z01: SHIFT IN YEMEN MEDIA COVERAGE AND RISING  
POPULAR ANGER AGAINST THE U.S.

REF: A. SANAA 00576  
B. SANAA 00516

Classified By: Ambassador Edmund J. Hull for Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Yemen media coverage of Operation Iraq Freedom and anti-war protests underwent a noticeable shift in tone from low-key for several days to more sensationalist since March 23. Initially, it appears that the ROYG attempted to down-play media coverage to minimize public outrage. However, criticism of Yemen's position by the Iraqi Vice President on March 23 has apparently made the ROYG anxious to counter accusations of agreeing with the war in Iraq. Reports coming to us from a variety of sources indicate that the level of anti-war sentiment among Yemenis is on the rise. The risk of further protest or other violent acts remains, although the ROYG has given emphatic assurance that Amcits will be protected and further violent demonstrations will not be tolerated. End Summary.

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Low-Key Coverage until March 23  
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¶2. (U) Local Yemen media coverage gave only sterilized media reports on the demonstrations that took place on March 21 and the continuing war in Iraq until March 23. Newspapers and local television and radio presented factual reports of events, drawing heavily on independent news wire services such as AP and Reuters for the content of their information. Even newspapers that are notorious for printing unsubstantiated and sensational information and are known to be anti-American, such as Al-Shumu, reported mostly factual information.

¶3. (U) During the demonstrations on March 21, Yemen radio and television did not report on the event until later in the evening when the two news outlets reported only factual information (Ref A).

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Shift in Media Coverage Spurred by Iraqi Statement  
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¶4. (U) On March 23, al-Jazeera and Yemeni television showed a live, televised press conference by the Iraqi Vice President. The Vice President spoke in anger about three categories of Arab countries: those that overtly support the aggressors, those that are indifferent and those that are "failures." The "failure" category included several points that clearly referred to Yemen without mentioning it specifically. These included the suppression of public opinion through the media, the "shooting of demonstrators" and the forging of security committees to deal with the situation.

¶5. (U) On March 24, in contrast to previous media reporting, the Yemen Times, an independent and usually pro-American newspaper, showed a large color photo of the slain boy on its front page with a headline reading "IT'S WAR". Over 80 percent of the newspaper contains negatively slanted articles and editorials regarding U.S. action in Iraq, the negative effects of the war on the Yemen economy, worldwide negative reaction, photos of private citizens injured in Iraq and continued U.S. assistance to Israel.

¶6. (U) Al-Thawra, an official daily and usually moderate to pro-American newspaper, on the afternoon of March 23, printed photos of U.S. missiles and bombs used by U.S. led forces in the war in Iraq. One headline carried the rejection to the U.S. demand to expel Iraqi diplomats from Yemen. The March 24 edition carried an editorial that says "...The flagrant aggression against Iraq...without any legitimate or legal justification has made it obvious that its real motives do not only target that country (Iraq) but all Arab nations are a target."

¶7. (U) Yemen TV and radio have also elevated their tone against the war in Iraq. These reports are much more frequent.

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Public Reaction Angry  
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18. (C) The ROYG efforts until the shift were overshadowed by programming on al-Jazeera that continued to show violent images of the war in Iraq and graphic images of the 3/21 demonstration. Al-Jazeera showed film footage of the father carrying his slain son, both covered in blood. Post believes that a large portion of the Yemeni population watches al-Jazeera for its news information.

19. (C) We continue to hear Yemenis expressing disdain for Saddam and acknowledging the expected benefit of his regime's removal. At the same time, information received from several sources indicates that popular opposition to the war is hardening, and that the risk of violent protest or individual violent acts remains significant. Al-Jazeera broadcast images of coalition POWs and KIAs are likely contributing to this trend. One individual said that many Yemenis are discussing jihad but more on an individual basis because, in his words, more individuals are contemplating acts of violence against the U.S. This correlates with the "lone wolf" scenario of possible terrorist attacks (Ref B).

HULL